

Island Creek Oysters

BY CLIPPER STAFF

If you're a fan of oysters, you've probably heard of Island Creek Oysters. If you're not a fan of oysters but you are familiar with Duxbury, you've probably also heard of Island Creek Oysters. If you don't fit into either of these categories, you will now.

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A self-dubbed "crazy idea," Island Creek Oysters began when lifelong resident Skip Bennett planted his first oysters in 1992. Bennett had spent three years growing quahogs in Duxbury Bay.

After a couple of years, Bennett was joined by Christian Horne, an oyster farmer from Maine, and Don Merry, the owner of a local fish market. By 2000, the company had grown to include Bennett's father, Bill, and began selling oysters to local restaurants from the back of a pickup truck. The business is located on Parks Street. The location has proven to be essential in the success of the business.

When asked why he chose Duxbury for his business, Bennett said it was his first choice, and the right choice. "This is where I grew up," he said. "This is a great place to live in and a great place to work as well." Because of its local ties, Bennett said the farm is not only environmentally sustainable, but also helps generate business in town for other industries.

As the oyster farm continued to succeed, Island Creek Oyster evolved into one of the biggest wholesale oyster companies, selling to 500 restaurants across the c o u n t r y . There are currently two Island Creek Oyster Bar restaurants in operation and Bennett plans to start a third. Island Creek Oysters has also opened itself up to the public, hosting Farm Tours on Friday afternoons in the summer. The tour starts aboard the workboat, which takes passengers to the hatchery at Duxbury Bay Maritime School to see how it all begins. The tour makes stops at the back river to visit the nursery, the oyster beds and finally the Oysterplex, where visitors will get to see the last stage of the oyster farming process. "We have gone through a few iterations of farm tours," said Chris Sherman, Island Creek president. "The tours are the result of a general effort to increase public access to the farm so people can see the process and learn about the crazy amount of time and energy that goes into the oyster market." There are very few farms that give similar tours, Sherman said, which makes the experience so much more enjoyable. Before the tour wraps up, visitors shuck oysters and enjoy a fresh feast. "The feedback has been very positive," Sherman said. "It's a lot of fun. Visitors walk away with some great knowledge about farming and how our oysters affect Duxbury Bay, and they have a belly full of Island Creek."

Bennett said there are pros and cons to starting a business in Duxbury. He said the town has been supportive of his unique business.

“The town has allowed the oyster farming industry to build,” he said. “That’s not true in every community. That is a big win for us.”

On the flip side, a challenge for Island Creek Oysters has been finding enough space to expand his business.

“There are a very limited number of commercial properties in Duxbury,” Bennett said. Bennett, who had the first oyster-farming license in town, operates on one core value: to create a business that makes the town proud.

“It’s nice to see people live and work here in Duxbury,” Bennett said. “Most people when they can’t afford to live here in Duxbury they have to commute to the city to go to work. This is an industry that allows people to live and work here in Duxbury. That is something very gratifying.”



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